



Bureau of Law Enforcement Hunter Recruitment and Retention and Shooting Sports Programs *FY2012 Annual Report*

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) has a long history of promoting safe and accessible hunting and shooting. In response to trends indicating a decline in the number of hunters in the future, WDNR has implemented a number of programmatic and planning actions to encourage participation in hunting and the shooting sports. For example, wardens and some wildlife staff are encouraged to include mentoring and organizing events in their annual work plans, and a Hunting and Shooting Sports Coordinator position was added in 2011 to coordinate initiatives including the Learn to Hunt and Shooting Sports programs. This report summarizes the efforts of numerous wardens and wildlife staff, in addition to the many volunteers and mentors, whose contributions made the FY2012 Learn to Hunt and Shooting Sports program accomplishments possible.

Mission

Promote and guarantee Wisconsin's hunting heritage by ensuring that all citizens have access to hunting through effective recruitment and retention techniques.

Vision

In partnership with the current generation of hunters, enhance the hunting heritage, the hunter's role in conservation, and contribute to Wisconsin's future economic vitality by recruiting the next generation of hunters.

Goal

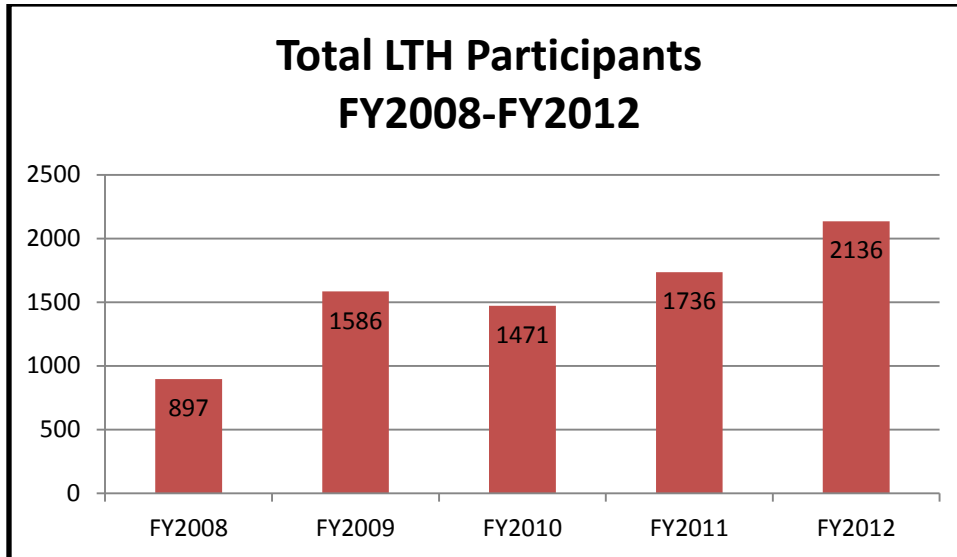
Slow the anticipated decline of hunter numbers and improve access for hunters and recreational shooters to safe local shooting by partnering with stakeholders.

Evaluation of Annual Objectives

Learn to Hunt (LTH) Participation

Objective: Increase number of LTH participants by 5%.

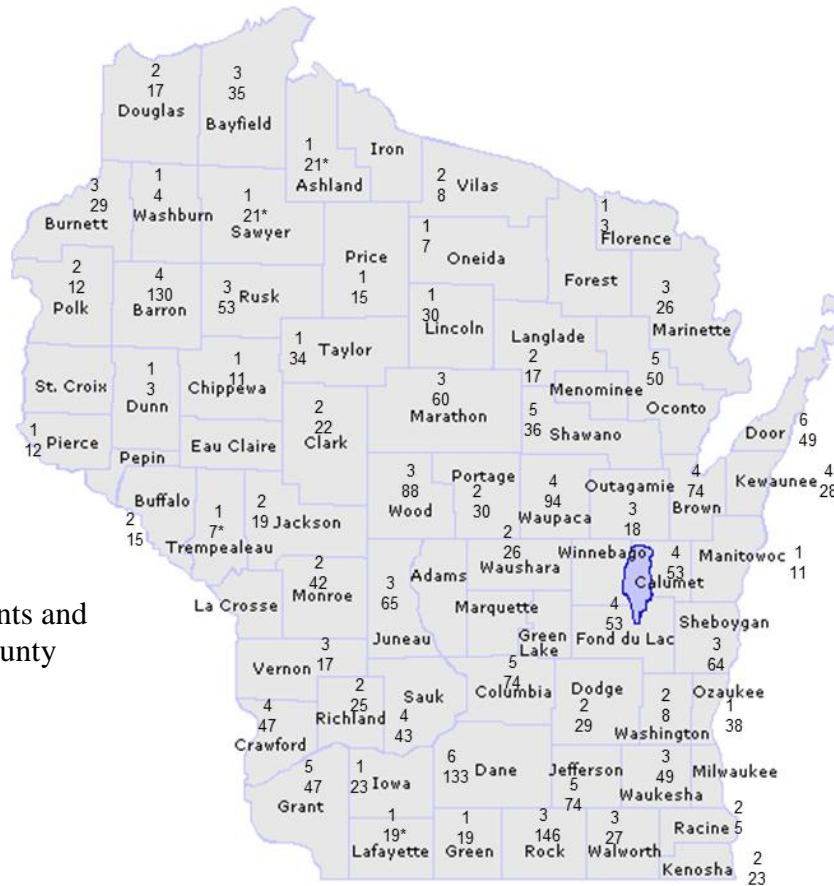
Results: The number of LTH participants increased by 23% from FY2011 to FY2012, with 2,136 hunters attending a LTH event in FY2012.



Learn to Hunt Event Location

Objective: One LTH event in every county or adjacent county or alternative outdoor recreational event.

Results: During FY2012, 131 LTH events were held in 60 of Wisconsin's 72 counties (83%), meeting the objective. If you would like to help, consider holding a LTH event next year in one of the counties not represented in FY2012, including Adams, Eau Claire, Forest, Green Lake, Iron, LaCrosse, Marquette, Milwaukee, Pepin, St. Croix, and Winnebago Counties.



FY2012 LTH Events and Participants by County



Learn to Hunt Female Participation

Objective: Increase number of female LTH participants by 5%.

Results: In FY2011, 295 of the total LTH participants were females. In FY2012, the number of female LTH participants increased to 449. Female participation in LTH events increased 52% from FY2011 to FY2012.

Sustainable Foods LTH Events

With increasing interest in reducing the environmental impacts associated with growing and raising our food, efforts have been directed at introducing adults to hunting as a way to utilize renewable resources to obtain quality free-range protein.

Objective: Increase from 1 to 3 sustainable foods LTH events.

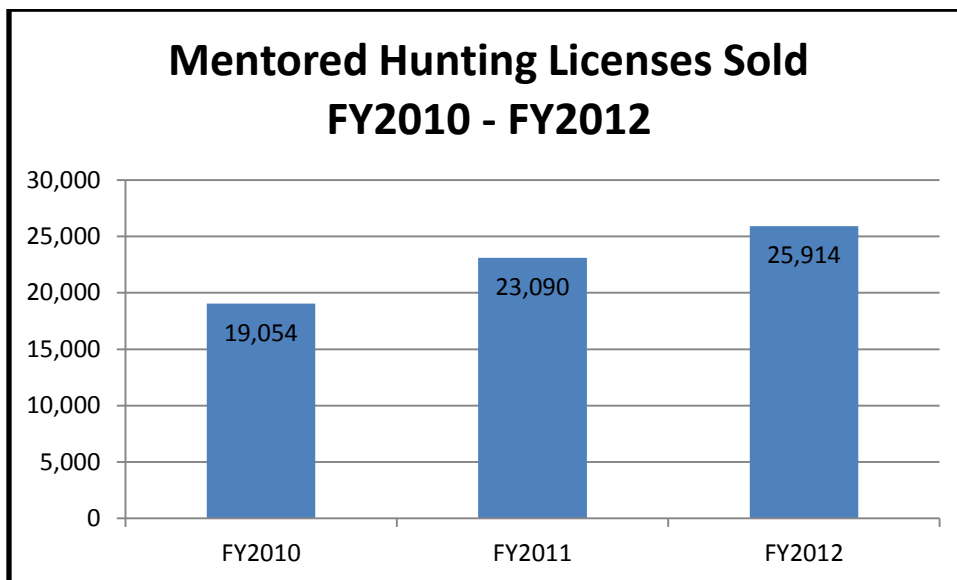
Results: 3 coop events were held in FY12, with over 45 adult participants.

Mentored Hunting

Since September 1, 2009, anyone 10 and older may hunt in Wisconsin without first completing a hunter education course if he or she is accompanied by a licensed hunter (mentor), hunts within arm's reach of the mentor, and follows other program rules. This one-on-one opportunity gives first-time hunters a chance to try hunting in a safe situation and enables veteran hunters to pass on their passion for the outdoors.

Objective: Increase number of mentor licenses by 2%

Results: Nearly 26,000 mentored hunting licenses were sold in Wisconsin during FY2012, a 12% increase over FY2011. The number of mentored hunting licenses sold has increased 36% since the program began in FY2010. However, the annual increases appear to be slowing as the program ages.



Shooting Sports Programs

Objective: Hold 5 shooting sports programs.

Results: At least 10 events were held statewide in FY2012. An example of such events is the “Women on Target” program designed to provide an introductory shooting experience.

Nearly 90 women participated in “Women on Target” event on May 19, 2012 sponsored by the Dunn County Fish and Game Club and held at the Menomonie Shooting Range. The event was an introductory shooting experience for many of the women and featured numerous shooting stations with handguns, rifles, muzzleloaders, shotguns, trap shooting and archery. Several women subsequently signed up for an upcoming Learn to Pheasant Hunt event. This and many other introductory events sponsored by dedicated partners are helping to ensure a strong future of hunting and shooting sports in Wisconsin.



May 2012 Women on Target event sponsored by the Dunn County Fish and Game Club

Multicultural LTH events

Objective: Increase multicultural LTH events

Results: One LTH squirrel event was held in the Northern Unit of the Kettle Moraine State Forest for those of Hmong descent.

Local food/food co-op LTH events

Objective: Increase LTH events aimed at young adults interested in sustainable living

Results: Three LTH events were held on UW-Madison campus. All were filled to capacity. Several more events at different campuses are planned for FY13.

Hunting Future Search Conference

On February 22-24, 2012 approximately 30 hunting leaders from across the state gathered at the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point Treehaven Field Station to identify strategies aimed at reducing the loss of licensed hunters in the state. In her invitation to stakeholders, DNR Secretary Cathy Stepp said, *“Though this planning effort is being organized by the Wisconsin DNR and includes some DNR staff as participants, this is not about gathering input from stakeholder groups about what the agency alone should be doing to promote hunting. This is about what our hunting community determines what it too must do to affect our future. Moving forward will require creative action and partnerships between hunters, government agencies, industry, universities, conservation organizations and landowners.”* Collaboratively, the group identified four

topics for immediate attention, including 1) communications, 2) access to hunting land, 3) recruiting under-represented groups and 4) conservation and habitat management education. Subcommittees began work on each topic with the intent of creating action plans with specific assignments. The DNR will assist on-going subcommittee efforts by facilitating future activities.

Public Shooting Range Renovation Update

Renovations are planned for four public land shooting ranges in FY2013, including Snaketrack range in Iron County, Caywood range in Vilas County, the McMiller range in Waukesha County, and Yellowstone range in Lafayette County.

Completed improvements to the Waushara County range in FY2012 include a new parking area behind the shooting benches, side berms between target sections, rebuilding all backstops and adding wheelchair accessibility. Operating Engineers Local 139 based in Coloma donated significant time and resources to accomplish the earthwork, including the use of 16 pieces of heavy machinery. Wildlife and sharecrop funds covered the cost of gravel for the new road and walkways. The Wautoma High School shop class built shooting benches including one to serve disabled shooters. Pittman-Robertson excise tax money was used to cover a portion of the renovation costs including shooting benches, gating, and signage. The range reopened to the public on June 26, 2012.



Aerial view showing Waushara County Range earthwork in progress, April 2012



Operating Engineers Local 139 constructing backstops at Waushara County Range, April 2012



A shooting/picnic bench constructed at the Redgranite Correctional Facility

Looking Ahead – Plans for FY2013

Hunter Challenge

The objective of the Hunter Challenge is to slow the decline in hunter numbers in age groups 10-19, 20-29, and 30-39 by encouraging hunters to work within their community and their social networks to recruit new hunters, and return lapsed hunters. Hunting groups and local rod and gun clubs have strong community ties and are a huge resource available to enact this program. The key is to make a difference locally. We will promote the challenge with local clubs/groups and report back to them the results of a county-specific analysis of the number of resident hunters in each age group. We will utilize presentations, emails, and web updates to communicate results. Maps will compare the number of resident hunters in the county in each particular age group with the number in each of the previous two years. The goal is to maintain or increase the number of youth hunters in 22 counties, young adult hunters in 34 counties, and adult hunters in 13 counties.

Tracking LTH Participation

A recent evaluation by Kool and Holsman has shown that greater than 80% of LTH participants have dads who hunt and have already gone hunting. Retention of young hunters is definitely an important need in hunter recruitment and retention. In addition, we are adapting the LTH program to improve its effectiveness at recruiting new hunters. A number of innovative procedures have been developed to push LTH to become a more effective recruitment tool such as LTH's for college hunt clubs, food co-op/slow foods, and web sign-up. LTH effectiveness as a recruitment tool and participants' continuation in hunting will be evaluated by type of LTH (college hunt clubs, food co-op/slow foods, web sign-up, etc...) age of participants, hunting history prior to LTH, and other factors as they are identified. LTH procedures, types, and delivery methods will be adjusted to improve hunter recruitment tools.

“Hunting for Sustainability”

We plan to develop a pathway to hunting initiation for adults who missed the natural path but have an interest in sustainably harvesting food, living and eating locally. This will increase the number of hunters and will create more hunting families. The objective is also to develop and promote a new social habitat (social support network) that sustains hunters. Curriculum will cover conservation in North America, how to hunt, hunter education, ethical hunting, sustainable hunting, and culinary experiences with wild game.

Wisconsin DNR will offer a pilot course at Madison College in fall of 2012. The course will be taught by experienced hunters and students/participants will be able to experience moral, ethical, sustainable hunting, conservation, and hunter education certification and will have the opportunity to try out a mentored hunt.

Interest in the pilot will be measured prior to scaling the classes up to cover more of the state. If interest is high (i.e. the class fills quickly and interest is strong) we plan to expand to several additional colleges. We will also track students longitudinally through customer id numbers to determine their level of participation in the future.

Background

Hunting provides essential components necessary for long-term and effective natural resource conservation including providing a mechanism to manage wildlife populations, funding for management, and a valuable connection to the natural world in an increasingly urbanized society. However, the total number of hunters Wisconsin DNR reported to the federal government has declined from 770,000 in 2000 to about 704,000 in 2010.

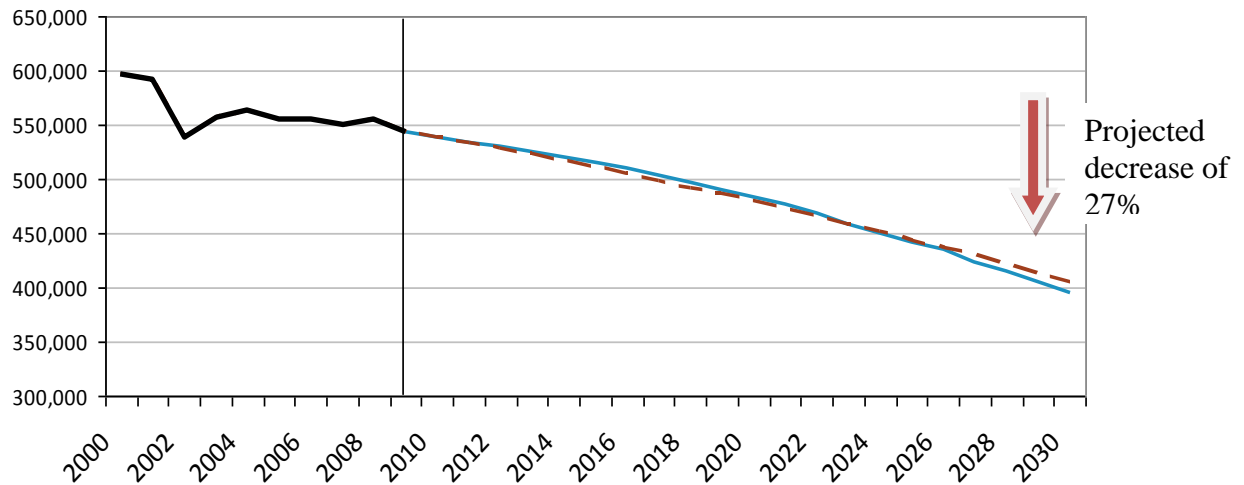
A [2011 demographic study](#) completed by the University of Wisconsin's Applied Population Laboratory in conjunction with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources projected the male gun deer hunter population, which comprised 91% of Wisconsin's gun deer licenses buyers, will decline over the next twenty years. Overall, the model suggests that in 2020, the number of resident male gun hunters will drop to about 480,000 (compared to 549,505 in 2010) and if the current patterns continue, the number could drop to 400,000 or fewer by 2030.

The evidence clearly indicates that we are at the beginning of a decline in number of hunters in Wisconsin. The decrease in the number of hunters will undoubtedly have negative repercussions on natural resource conservation if efforts are not taken to stem the tide.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) has a long history of promoting safe and accessible hunting and shooting opportunities including a commitment to provide ranges on public lands and a shooting range grant program to assist in maintenance and development on private ranges in exchange for some public access. There are an estimated 600-900 shooting ranges in Wisconsin and 13 on public land open and open to the public.

In response to identifying these trends, WDNR has supported a number of programmatic and planning actions to build capacity for enhancing participation in hunting, such as encouraging wardens and wildlife staff to include mentoring and organizing events in their annual work plans, and a Hunting and Shooting Sports Coordinator position was added in 2011 to catalyze and coordinate on-going initiatives including the Learn to Hunt and Shooting Sports programs.

Projected number of Wisconsin resident male gun deer hunters 2012-2030.



You can get involved!

We need your help to meet these goals and protect our hunting and shooting heritage. For more information contact Keith Warnke, Learn to Hunt Coordinator, at 608-576-5243 or keith.warnke@wisconsin.gov.

